



International Labour Organization
Organisation internationale du Travail
Organización Internacional del Trabajo

**Keynote Speech by Lawrence Jeff Johnson
Director, ILO Country Office for the Philippines (CO-Manila)
On the occasion of the Joint Conference-Workshop of HomeNet South-East
Asia (HomeNet SEA) and HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) on “Building Visibility
and Voice through Responsive Home based Workers’ Organizations in Asia:
Focus on ILO Convention 177 on Home Work”**

**Discovery Suites
2 August 2010**

Introduction

Mr. Berthold Leimbach, Resident Representative of FES
Dr. Rosalinda “Inday” Pineda Ofreneo, Regional Coordinator of Homenet South
East Asia
Mr Dan Gallin, Global Labour Institute
Ms. Chit Cilindro, DOLE
Representatives from UNIFEM Asia
Ms. Flor Cabatingan, Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP)
Mr. Tony Asper, Federation of Free Workers
Mr. Joshua Mata, Alliance for Progressive Labour (APL)
Representative from Employers Confederation of the Philippines
HOME-NET representatives from Asia

Honored guest, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen – good morning.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to address you today in this joint conference and workshop that includes promotion of ILO Convention 177- the Home Work Convention of 1996 - in the discussions to build visibility and voice of home-based workers in Asia.

On behalf of the ILO, let me congratulate the organizers - Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Home-Net South-East Asia. The theme of this seminar is an important one as it deals with home-workers who constitute a particularly vulnerable category of workers, many of whom are women.

Home workers face harsh realities. Many do not enjoy adequate legal protection, are generally isolated and have weak bargaining position. In many societies, home based workers are not recognized as workers and are seen to only provide supplemental income. Many receive less than the minimum wage and many more are involve unpaid labour. Many have no written contracts to protect them and are unaware of the market value of their products. They often work very long hours for little compensation and often work in condition with no security of employment. Many more face health and safety problems because of hazardous equipment and

production procedures. These are just a few examples of the problems faced by home workers.

The ILO recognizes these vulnerabilities and has discussed on many occasions, the working and living conditions of home workers. There are a number of Conventions that have provisions applicable to home workers. However, the ILO saw the need for standards that take into account the special needs and characteristics of home work.

Part of ILO's work involves the formulation and adoption of international labour standards covering all aspects of the working life, and covering various categories of workers. In 1996, the ILO tripartite constituents – employers, workers and government - around the world adopted the ILO Convention No. 177, *Home Work Convention* and the ILO Recommendation No. 184, *Home Work Recommendation*. For many, this signifies recognition that home based work has increasingly become a globally widespread phenomenon and is no longer limited to small number of communities or social groups.

The objective of ILO Convention 177 is to improve the situation of home-workers. It sets out the definition of home-workers and also requires the ratifying states to pursue and periodically review national policy, in consultation with organizations of workers and employers concerned with home-workers issues. A national policy focusing on home workers may be separate or appear as part of other policies.

ILO Recommendation 184 supplements the Convention and further elaborates on principles promoting equality of treatment between home-workers vis-à-vis other wage earners. It also identifies programme elements related to home work.

DW Agenda and the Promotion of ILO Convention 177 in the Philippines and Asia

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda promotes the "*opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity*". Decent work is the convergence of the four pillars:

- A) the promotion of basic rights at work
- B) generation of quality employment
- C) provision of social protection for all
- D) engaging in sustained social dialogue

The Philippines and other countries in Asia have taken steps to elaborate and operationalize decent work, defining priority concerns for the country and identifying strategies to address these concerns. The ILO Country Teams and Technical Units work closely with our partners to promote and operationalize the concept.

The Philippines Decent Work Common agenda includes the ratification of ILO Convention 177. I would like to note that the constituents and social partners, particularly the home based workers, have taken strong ownership in promoting this Convention. At present, the tripartite constituents have already endorsed its ratification.

Current initiatives under the ILO's Decent Work Country Programme for the Philippines promotes gender equality through both gender-specific activities and gender mainstreaming strategies in its activities. The promotion of Conventions related to gender equality included ILO Convention 177.

ILO support in Asia mainly focused on technical advisory services to support the formulation of national policies, including promotion of ILO Convention 177. For instance, the ILO provided advisory assistance to Thailand, to support adoption of an **Act on Protection towards the Home-workers**. It is my understanding that the Act has obtained acceptance by the legislators and is now for discussion by the two houses of representative in August 2010.

In India, an important recent development is the admission of Self Employed Women's Organization (SEWA) to International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). SEWA is a trade union organisation of poor, self-employed women. ITUC which is considered to be the world's largest trade union federation.

Ratification of ILO C. 177 and the Role of HomeNet

ILO Convention 177 has thus far been ratified by only 7 member states; however, the Convention has yet to be ratified by a country in Asia. The conference provides an opportunity for discussion on how to include Asia in the ratification record of ILO Convention 177.

HomeNet South-East Asia and South Asia, including the national network of home-workers, are already in a position to be major advocates of ILO Convention 177 in the region.

The Benefits of Ratifying ILO C. 177

Let me share some thoughts on why countries should ratify ILO Convention 177 and how this can support home workers to have a stronger voice.

- 1 The increasing globalisation of markets and financial structures, reinforces the role of ILO Convention 177 because it provides the global minimum labour standards covering for home-workers. In today's global economy, firms tend to operate in many part of the world and in tern spread their production process across borders. Through subcontracts, home-workers tend to be at the initial stage of production in the value added chain.

It is important for home workers to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding of their rights under ILO Convention 177 so that they can use the instrument to establish the social floor and prevent downward spiral in the application of standards.

- 2 The ratification of ILO Convention 177 and Recommendation 184 provides an enabling environment for home workers to organize a different levels – national, regional or global.

These instruments recognize home-workers right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing, including cooperatives, and to participate in the activities of such organisations.

The home-workers can also join trade union federations and confederations. The right to collective bargaining is specified in the Recommendation as a means for home-workers to determine their terms and conditions of work. When home-workers have stronger voice, there are greater chances for improved access to resources and programmes which in turn can lead to productivity growth and poverty reduction within the communities.

- 3 Ratification can protect existing enabling national policies and laws protecting home workers from being reversed or repealed that could come from change in political climate.
- 4 ILO Supervisory mechanism ensures compliance through sustained “dialogue” with government where legal and implementation gaps are identified. The ILO mechanisms also provide opportunities to identify areas of ILO technical assistance to improve application of the Convention.

In closing, I feel that the ILO is very fortunate to be part of this exercise - especially since the discussions involve the promotion of a key ILO instrument.

I am sure that the discussions will be an enjoyable, active and productive. However, let me remind you that it's the beginning of a significant amount of work for each of you once you return home to your respective countries.

You will need to work together in order to translate the discussions heard today along with the specific recommendations into meaningful and sustainable action as: home-workers and as advocates at the country and regional level.

Your discussions here today provides a cornerstone to identify opportunities for ILO assistance in the future – particularly in the promotion of C.177. I therefore look forward to the outcomes of your deliberation.

As many of you may know, I assumed responsibility as country director in the Philippines on July 1st of this year. I can honestly say given all of the activities over the last 30 days, I have truly been welcomed into the country and I'm confident that each of you will have a pleasant stay here in the Philippines.